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ABSTRACT

Violence against women as a social or psychological issue did not receive much attention in the professional literature until the mid-1970s. Previous research regarding battered women has been limited to the use of subjects drawn from shelters/safe houses specifically designed for this population. In view of this potential limitation, this study was designed to expand the generalization of the research findings to include a sample of battered women that was drawn from the non-sheltered, general population. Thus, three samples of subjects were tested: a sample of abused women (N=24) drawn from a sheltered population, a sample of battered college women (N=44) drawn from a non-sheltered population, and a group of non-battered women (N=113). Subjects were drawn from introductory psychology classes and from shelters for battered women. Through the evaluation of level of self-esteem of each sample this study ascertained similarities and/or differences between the two samples of battered women, as well as providing a replication of the previously reported self-esteem differential that exists between battered and non-battered women. Results indicated the non-battered women had significantly higher self-esteem than did the sheltered women or the battered women not from a shelter. Further research is needed to explain the increased verbal abuse in the non-shelter battered women versus the shelter battered women. (ABL)

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# The Relationship Between Battered Women And Self-Esteem

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## Self-Esteem, Physical and Verbal Abuse in Battered Women

Violence against women as a social or a psychological issue did not receive much attention in the professional literature until the mid-1970's. The statistics on violence against women in an intimate relationship that have been amassed since the 1970's are staggering. A conservative estimate suggests that each year in the United States, 6 million women are beaten by their intimate partner (Straus, 1990).

"Battered women's affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses often become distorted by their single focus on survival" (Walker & Browne, 1985, p. 186). They often display fearfulness, passivity, learned helplessness, anxiety and/or hyperviligance because of the possibility of future attacks. Characteristic of battered women is lower self-esteem, social isolation, and traditionalism (Blackman, 1990). These characteristics may suggest the presence of personality factors that are manifested because of the unpredictability of the abuse (Browne, 1980; Rosewater, 1982).

As more women have sought help, researchers have identified characteristics common to most victims of an abusive relationship (Benzel & York, 1988). These characteristics include being fearful and depressed, having a low self-concept, and displaying difficulty in making decisions independent of the partner. Consequently, battered women may be incapable of expressing or defending themselves and tend to be self-conscious and overly sensitive to criticism (Coopersmith, 1967).

In comparing battered and non-battered women, Campbell (1989) found that the battered group was significantly lower on several of the items under review. These items were self-esteem, self-care agency, self-blame, depression, and control in the relationship.

It is interesting to note that previous research regarding battered women has been limited to the use of subjects drawn from shelters/safe houses specifically designed for this population. In view of this potential limitation, the present study was designed to expand the generalization of the research findings to include a sample of battered women that was drawn from the non-sheltered, general population. Thus, three samples of subjects were tested in the present project; a sample of battered women drawn from a sheltered population, a sample of battered women drawn from a non-sheltered population, and a group of non-battered women. Through the evaluation of level of self-esteem in each sample the present study ascertained similarities and/or differences between the two samples of battered women, as well as providing a replication of the previously reported self-esteem differential that exists between battered and non-battered women.

## Method

### Subjects

Undergraduate college students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at a Midwestern state university volunteered to serve as subjects. Additionally, subjects were obtained from several Midwestern shelters for battered women.

### Testing Instruments

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS, Straus, 1985), and the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) were combined into a self-administering booklet.

Form A of the TSBI was employed to evaluate level of self-esteem. The TSBI is a 16-item scale designed "to provide an objective measure of self-esteem or social competence" (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974).

Form R of the CTS was developed to assess the use of reasoning tactics, verbal aggression, and physical aggression. Form R consists of 19 actions that describe various ways of dealing with conflict. The CTS items are arranged in perceived order of severity using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6 (with 1= once, 6= more than 20 times).

### Procedure

Testing of the college sample took place during regularly scheduled class sessions. Informed consent forms were completed by all subjects prior to distribution of test booklets. Testing of the shelter sample took place at each shelter during the initial interview or during group counseling.

## Results and Discussion

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance, incorporating location (shelter vs non-shelter) and type of abuse (verbal vs physical) was performed on the CTS scores of the battered sample. The results of this analysis yielded significance for both factors. As can be seen from Table 1, CTS scores were higher for verbal than physical abuse, and for the shelter sample than as compared to the non-shelter sample.

The second analysis was conducted to compare self-esteem among the NSH, SHL, and NAB groups. The results of this analysis yielded a significant group effect. The Newman-Keuls procedure was employed to further delineate specific group differences. The NAB subjects had significantly higher ($p < .05$) self-esteem than did the SHL and NSH subjects; which did not differ from each other. The importance of abuse in predicting self-esteem deficits is consistent with previous research. [these data are shown in table 2].

In conclusion, this research indicates a significant difference in SHL and NSH groups. Further research is indicated for the SHL and NSH groups to explain the increased verbal abuse in the NSH groups. A logical next step would be to replicate the present study and match the groups on several different demographic variables in hopes of further distinguishing the differences and similarities between these groups.

TABLE 1. **CHRONICITY OF PHYSICAL AND VERBAL ABUSE IN SHELTERED AND NON-SHELTERED GROUPS**

| | Sheltered | | | Non-Sheltered | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | (N) | M | SD | (N) |
| Verbal Abuse | 25.54 | 8.89 | (28) | 11.06 | 7.62 | (137) |
| Physical Abuse | 21.00 | 16.70 | (24) | 5.30 | 5.75 | (44) |

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG (1) COLLEGE ABUSED (CAB), (2) SHELTERED ABUSED (SAB), & (3) NON-ABUSED (NAB) GROUPS

| | M | SD | (N) |
|---|---|---|---|
| CAB | 38.59 | 9.18 | (44) |
| SAB | 36.25 | 9.53 | (24) |
| NAB | 41.65 | 7.74 | (113) |

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